SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
GOAL 4

Status of Implementation in the Arab Region
A Journey since 2015
Adopted by the global community in September 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development comprising of 17 goals, is a call to action for people, planet and prosperity. Deemed central to the realization of this universal and aspirational agenda, education is articulated as a standalone of 17 goal, SDG4, which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” Education contributes to the achievement of all other SDGs – namely those related to ending poverty (SDG1), health and well-being (SDG3), gender equality (SDG5), decent work (SDG8), reducing inequalities (SDG10), sustainable cities (SDG11), responsible consumption and production (SDG12), climate action (SDG13), peace (SDG16) and partnerships (SDG17).

Since the adoption of the Agenda and commitments made by all Member States of the United Nations and partners, Arab Member States and region’s partners have undertaken decisive actions since 2015. The present Brief Note thus provides a report on the status of implementation of SDG4 in the Arab region, highlighting Arab region’s perspectives and priorities as well as collective efforts made and plans ahead by both Member States and partners towards achieving the goal by 2030.

From MDG-EFA to SDG4: Vision, perspectives and priority areas in the Arab region

Based on national evaluation of the 15-year framework of MDG and EFA, Arab Member States at the level of Ministers articulated region’s vision, perspectives and priorities at Arab Regional Ministerial Conference on Post-2015 held in Sharm El Shiekh, Egypt, in December 2014, and informed the process of global agenda setting that ultimately resulted in the articulation of SDG4:

- **Perspectives**

  Education is a fundamental human right. It is a basis for the realization of other rights and essential for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development, as well as prosperity in the Arab States. Arab Member States had made considerate progress since 2000 in achieving the Millennium Development Goal 2 and Education for All goals. However, the countries recognized that they must exert further efforts to meet the new challenges and demands. Recognizing that the vision of EFA was still valid, Member States acknowledged the need to go further in the Post-2015 agenda to address all levels of education by giving focus to learning and taking into consideration the transformative, inclusive, lifelong learning approaches.

  Thus, Arab Member States reiterated commitments to work together in the region with its shared unique language and rich cultural traditions and history in order to ensure the fulfillment of everyone’s right to education. They notably committed to the principle of education as a public good and a building block for democracy, social cohesion and sustainable development.

  The most significant challenge to progress in the region is conflict, which exacerbates inequality, poverty, exclusion and marginalization and puts pressures on Arab States to ensure access to quality education to internally displaced persons and refugee communities. Evidence clearly demonstrates the long-term negative impact of the absence of provision of education on refugees and internally displaced persons of learning age. These issues were acknowledged as cross national borders, thus requiring regionally supportive strategies and partnerships are required to address them.
**Priority areas**

**Equitable and inclusive access for all**
- Minimum of 9 years of free, compulsory quality basic education for all with special attention to early childhood education.
- Priority attention paid to address all forms of exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, disparities and inequalities in access to and completion of education at all levels.
- Provision of youth and adult education and learning, including literacy, through formal and non-formal pathways, in collaboration with all governmental and non-governmental actors.

**Quality and relevance of education, and teachers**
- Development and improvement of all aspects of education quality and invest in policies, programmes and systems of measuring and monitoring learning outcomes.
- Support to, and the provision of sustained professional development for, teachers, educators, school management and members of supporting institutions, taking into consideration the best practices in the region and sharing information on these.

**Citizenship and Education for Sustainable Development**
- Integration of values of citizenship, patriotism and 21st century skills into our education systems by emphasizing the knowledge, skills, values and practices conducive to sustainable development.
- Improvement of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and higher education, linking youth training to the requirements of the labor market and providing them with guidance and opportunity to become productive citizens, which in turn contributes to inclusive development in our respective societies.

**Enabling policies and mechanisms for SDG4- Education 2030**
- Better use of best practices and experiences within the Arab region and from other regions through comprehensive national monitoring and evaluation systems to generate sound evidence, which we will use for policy formulation and management of education systems.
- Improvement of the governance and management of our education systems and of accountability measures and community involvement to rationalize education decisions.
- Allocation to sufficient financial resources in an equitable manner and in accordance with the set internationally recognized benchmarks for public expenditure on education reaching 6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and/or 20% of the total public expenditure at least, with priority attention given to developing mechanisms enabling long term planning for providing educational services in emergency situations.
- Revitalization of community involvement in articulating educational needs of the most marginalized populations and developing innovative approaches to ensure access, equity and quality of education.
- Provision of coordination mechanism and technical support for the implementation, monitoring and enhanced accountability.

Given the fact that the region is affected by multiple protracted crises that heavily impact upon education, SDG4 is considered as a **broad-based, inspirational agenda that can strengthen the humanitarian and development nexus.**
The Incheon Declaration adopted at the World Education Forum (Republic of Korea, May 2015) entrusted UNESCO to lead and coordinate SDG4 through the *Education 2030 Framework for Action* at global, regional and national levels. Adopted by 184 Member States of UNESCO and the global education community at the High Level Meeting alongside UNESCO’s 38th General Conference (Paris, November 2015), the Education 2030 Framework for Action is the roadmap to lead the international community and national governments in their efforts to achieve SDG4 until 2030.

In order to fulfill its responsibilities as the lead coordinator, UNESCO established the **SDG-Education 2030 Global Steering Committee** that comprises representatives from Member States, UN/Multilateral Organizations, Civil Society Organizations, Private Foundations and youth on a rotational basis. It is a formal committee that is co-chaired by UNESCO and a Member State (Japan for the 2019-2020 period) and that meets twice a year. It is the supreme coordination and partnership mechanism to steer global, regional and national movements towards realizing the Goal by 2030. This Committee elaborated and submitted a substantive contribution to the **2019 High Level Political Forum** that will discuss SDG4 for the first time.

At the regional level, in early 2016, UNESCO led establishment of the **Arab Regional Support Group for Education 2030** that comprises some 24 members drawn from Member States and regional representatives at Global Steering Committee, regional organizations, UN/Multilateral Organizations, civil society organizations, and private foundations.

At the national level, SDG4 work is coordinated by a **National Coordinator** appointed by Minister of Education responsible for SDG4. In some countries, there is a national coordination mechanism embedded within existing sector coordination mechanism to implement and report on progress effectively. In other countries, there is a strong Agenda 2030-wide coordination mechanism to which Ministry of Education fully contributes.

### Generating and disseminating knowledge in support of Arab Member States and partners

In order to support mainstreaming and integrating national commitments to SDG4 in national education processes, UNESCO developed and disseminated the very first step undertaken by UNESCO was to develop and disseminate the **Arab Regional SDG4 Resource Kit** available in Arabic, English and French that consists of the most essential documents and resources relevant to the Goal and to be of support to Member States. The Kit also contains a CD-ROM containing hundreds of education resources.

The Arab region is home to a diverse range of knowledge, be it good practices, promising experiences or expertise. As such, UNESCO developed an **interactive multi-lingual web portal** entirely dedicated to SDG4-Education 2030 Agenda: [www.education2030-arab-states.org](http://www.education2030-arab-states.org). In addition UNESCO hosts one of the most prominent electronic educational knowledge platforms, [www.tarbiyah21.org](http://www.tarbiyah21.org), with over 2000 subscribers to regular electronic newsletters.

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1 Egypt, UAE, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, League of Arab States, ALECSO, ISESCO, ABEGS, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNRWA, ESCWA, WFP, ECW, GPE, CCNGO, Education International, Education Above All Foundation, Open Society Foundation, RCEP, RCOE, ECDRC
At the global level, the main knowledge is the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM). The GEM is an editorially independent, authoritative and evidence-based annual report published by UNESCO. Its mandate is to monitor progress towards the education targets in the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework. The substance of the GEM Report is developed and its quality assured by an experienced team under the leadership of the GEM Report Director.

The GEM Report is a singular, comprehensive, analytical and authoritative reference for the global follow-up and review of education. With 15 reports produced since 2002, the Report has acquired extensive experience in monitoring and policy analysis and a global reputation for excellence, covering themes ranging from inequality, gender, teaching, and learning to conflict, literacy and early childhood care and education. The latest report launched in November 2018 focuses on migration and displacement. The regional report is currently in development and is expected to be launched by November 2019.

From global collective commitments to regional and national actions

Following the adoption of aforementioned Education 2030 Framework for Action in November 2015, Arab Member States and partners gathered at the First Regional Meeting on Education 2030 (ARMED I) in Cairo, Egypt, in December 2015 in order to discuss and agree on what was then adopted as the ‘Cairo Roadmap’ to help steer integration/mainstreaming of national commitments into countries’ respective education development processes. Much focus was made on advocacy, awareness raising and communication around the role of education in the Agenda 2030 and rethinking national education development through key themes of Education 2030, namely universality of rights-based, country-led agenda for public good, expanded access to all levels of education, holistic approach to learning throughout life, renewed emphasis on equity and quality of education for life and work.

The Second Regional Meeting (ARMED II) was held in Dubai, in March 2017, in order to take stock of progress made on the Cairo Roadmap and adopt a new plan of action. The second meeting helped keep up with the significant momentum gained in the region, to take stock of progress made on the implementation of the Regional Roadmap by Member States and partners, and to pave a way forward for more coordinated, targeted actions in 2017 and 2018 in challenging operational environments confronting the region. The meeting culminated in a new Roadmap called ‘Dubai Roadmap for 2017-2018). The Roadmap focused on four broad areas, namely Advocacy and Communication, Policy, Financing, Monitoring and Reporting.

One year and a half on, the Third Regional Meeting (AR-MED III) was convened at Dead Sea, Jordan, in November 2018 with thematic focus on the most challenging aspect of the Agenda: Quality of education. The regional meeting explored the curriculum-assessment-teacher nexus and discussed how best to ensure policy and programmatic response to a holistic and systemic approach to quality improvement.
In particular, the technical segment of the meeting acknowledged the multi-dimensional nature of quality education, and commit to ensuring quality education for all children and youth so that:

- All children and youth are healthy, motivated and supported by their parents, as well as equipped with appropriate skills for future work and life;
- They demonstrate effective and relevant learning, which results in broader social and economic gains for society – with behaviors linked to sustainable economic, social and environmental development; culture of peace and non-violence; equity; global citizenship; and cultural diversity.

Regional Policy Priorities and Dead Sea Commitments for the 2019 – 2020 period

The Outcome Statement of the regional meeting set out three policy priorities for the 2019-2020 period:

1. **Migration, displacement and education**

   Ensuring access to safe and conducive learning environments at all levels, providing opportunities to gain life-saving and enhancing knowledge and skills, supporting teachers and educators, and building resilient education systems

   The most significant challenge to progress in the majority of countries in the region is armed conflict which results in millions of forcibly displaced populations and which in turn exacerbates inequality, poverty, exclusion and marginalization. The devastating impact of crisis puts pressures on conflict-affected and host governments and communities to ensure provision of access to quality education at all levels, including higher education, to internally displaced persons and refugee communities, including girl and female learners and those with special needs. At the same time, the region has seen large-scale movements of people, particularly younger populations, in search of better opportunities both within their countries and beyond. Available evidence shows that the more educated they are, the more likely they move and that immigrants and migrants encounter challenges in the access to education and continuation of learning.

   Of critical policy and programmatic issues are: provision of policy and legal frameworks; continued support to basic education; role of non-formal and informal education for certified alternative and diverse learning pathways; recognition of prior learning; support for different languages of instruction; preparedness and competences of teachers and education personnel; quality data management; expansion of relevant learning opportunities in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education; and inter-sectoral collaboration, principally with child protection, health and nutrition (i.e. school feeding). These issues cross national borders and thus require regionally and mutually supportive strategies and partnerships to address them in the context of strengthening the humanitarian and development nexus.

2. **Quality and relevance of education**

   Ensuring coherent, holistic, systematic and sector-wide approaches to addressing the dimensions of quality and relevance in education

   Quality and relevance at all levels and alternative forms of learning are central to the Education 2030 Agenda and have long been the priority of all countries in the region. Nevertheless, an analysis of international large-scale assessment (TIMSS, PISA and PIRLS) and national examinations show low and, in some instances, further declining performance, while the difficulty in the transition to the world of work in the region results
in high youth unemployment and skill mismatch. At the same time, education systems in the Arab region have traditionally been focused on schooling rather than learning, without really focusing on skills acquisition. Moreover, while important tensions between quality and equity are prevailing in many education systems, additional challenges to balancing quality, equity and accountability have occurred over the last decade following the Arab spring movements in several countries.

Regardless of the state of development in the region, there are numerous challenges to this effect both at system level (policy, planning, monitoring and evaluation) and content (curriculum, teaching, and learning) levels. This requires a transformation of the education system in terms of what we learn and how we learn, and the promotion of open and flexible learning systems that put skills for life and work at the core of the 21st century learning agenda.

Of particular significance is the critical need of the alignment of curriculum, teachers and learning assessment that brings about both pedagogical and socio-economic advantages. The alignment furthers both system cohesiveness and cost-effectiveness and serves as a lever of integrating Education 2030 commitments and dimensions into the curriculum to enhance learning quality, especially with regard to skills development, Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and sustainable development, gender equality, peace, and intercultural understanding.

3. Financing of education: Increasing, optimizing use of, and accounting for, investment in education

All countries in the region have traditionally prioritized investment in education. The Gulf countries have recently become very important education donors in the region and beyond. Nevertheless, in recent times, the level of domestic spending in expenditures has plummeted in many countries because of such reasons as armed conflict, structural adjustment. In other countries, while there is high level of investment in education, it does not necessarily result in student achievement. In addition, many countries, including refugee-hosting countries, are highly dependent on external aid, which makes them highly susceptible to external shocks, and unexpected events, and which gravely compromise educational development. Furthermore, the education sector remains severely underfunded particularly to respond to the educational needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized in the region, including forcibly displaced populations.

Therefore, it is critical for countries to prioritize education expenditure, unify services provided by different organizations and strengthen national capacity in planning, managing, and accounting for resources through establishing a system like National Education Accounts, making use of a tool like projection and simulation model and further cultivating the public-private partnerships for innovative financing. At the same time, there is a need to ensure harmonization between the humanitarian and development funding.

Translating these policy priorities, the AR-MEDIII agreed on a set of commitments for Member States and Partners collectively known as ‘Dead Sea Commitments for 2019-2020.’

Based on a review of progress made during the last two Roadmaps (Cairo 2015-2016 and Dubai 2017-2018), the Dead Sea Commitments builds on ongoing national and regional efforts and responds to emerging issues in order to scale up initiatives and expand inter-sectoral and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

One of the main feature of the set of Commitments is to respond to the interconnected nature of SDG4 to ensure closer collaboration with other Goals that impact on, and contribute to, the success of inclusive and equitable education development at national level.
As such, Arab Member States and partners jointly commit to translating into action, thematic priorities and actions agreed to at the following regional conferences held in 2017 and 2018:

- Joint Statement - Regional Technical Meeting on the Alignment of Curriculum, Learning Assessment and Teachers: Third Regional Meeting on Education 2030 (Dead Sea, Jordan, November 2018)
- Tunis Declaration on the Centrality of School Feeding for Education, Inclusive Development and Stability in the Middle East and North Africa Region (Tunis, Tunisia, October 2018)
- Nairobi Declaration and Call for Action on Education: Bridging continental and global education frameworks for the Africa We Want (Nairobi, Kenya, April 2018)
- Declaration: Rethinking Education in the Arab Region (Arabic) (Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, December 2017)
- Outcome Statement: GCED Networking Meeting (Luxor, Egypt, November 2017)
- Sharm El Sheikh Statement: Higher Education in Crisis Situations in the Arab States (Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, March 2017)

### Member States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implement commitments made at various conferences and workshops as annexed in Outcome Statement</td>
<td>Ongoing to the end of 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continue with awareness campaigns on the Agenda 2030 and Education 2030 in particular at all levels.</td>
<td>Ongoing to the end of 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote sharing of experience and good initiatives at the national and regional levels through the use of different means (including, but not limited to, SDG4 regional web portal - <a href="http://education2030-arab-states.org">http://education2030-arab-states.org</a>)</td>
<td>Ongoing to the end of 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contribute to the National Voluntary Reporting (NVR) for the Agenda 2030 and prepare annual snapshot report on Education 2030 progress</td>
<td>Annually</td>
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<td>Undertake first five-year monitoring report on Education 2030</td>
<td>Throughout 2019 and due mid 2020</td>
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<td>Develop initiatives to mobilize domestic and external resources</td>
<td>Ongoing to the end of 2020</td>
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<td>Expand partnerships with national and regional partners, as well as UNESCO Category II Centers(*) to implement programs and capacity development plans</td>
<td>Ongoing to the end of 2020</td>
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<td>Identify and address policy and programmatic gaps to mainstreaming and promoting SDG4 at national level</td>
<td>Ongoing to the end of 2020</td>
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<td>Develop and implement capacity development plan at the Ministries of Education, based on the conducted capacity development needs assessment, including for strategic planning and implementation in Education in Emergencies and for monitoring and evaluation</td>
<td>Development of plan by end of 2017 Implementation of plan ongoing to the end of 2018</td>
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**Key achievements and challenges**

- **Key achievements**

  1. **Strong commitment and sustained engagement of Arab Member States**

     Arab Member States have led and remained substantially engaged in policy and technical dialogue (regional and international ministerial and technical meetings) and corresponding actions (elaboration of, commitment to, and implementation of, the successive Roadmaps and Commitments).

- **Example of national initiatives**

     With the Agenda being country-led, all countries in the Arab region have taken their own initiatives unpacking SDG4, and contextualizing, mainstreaming and integrating countries’ commitments into national processes. Some examples are indicated below:

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<th>Areas</th>
<th>Countries</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy and communication (awareness raising campaigns and events)</td>
<td>All countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and monitoring (Voluntary National Reports, other reports)</td>
<td>Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Palestine, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination and partnerships (national mechanism, partnership development, etc.)</td>
<td>Gulf States, Palestine, Syria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy and planning (SDG4 Strategy, National Strategic Plans anchored in SDG4, etc.)</td>
<td>Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity development with focus on indicators</td>
<td>All countries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Partners’ commitment to collective efforts
A group of some 23 Member States and organizations have been working together since early 2014 and have remained as a solid technical group to date. The group formalized its status by officially establishing ‘Arab Regional Support Group for SDG 4 – Education 2030 Agenda’ to ensure coordinated efforts to support Member States, as regards advocacy/communication, monitoring, country support. To date, the Group has met five times to take stock of the implementation of the Regional Roadmap and to jointly plan for and finance continuation of initiatives in 2019.

3. Positioning of SDG4 in the context of crisis situations
The region is confronted with multiple crises that heavily affect the state of education and has been implementing humanitarian response plans for more than a decade. While acute educational needs must be met for millions of out of school children, much-suffering teachers and dysfunctional/non-functional education system, countries in crisis and those affected by it equally recognize the need to combine both humanitarian and development interventions. Therefore, SDG 4 provides an excellent opportunity to position itself as the long-term goal towards which countries plan to rebuild national education system.

- Key challenges

1. In-depth national work – capacity development
More in-depth country support (capacity development) must be provided to ensure integration of SDG 4 into national education plans in a timely, technically sound manner

2. Quality of data – quantitative and qualitative
Greater investment is needed in national statistical systems, to provide more and better data that are the basis of sound education policy and planning. This includes data that can track progress, pinpoint the barriers to education access and quality and can be disaggregated to ensure that no child, young person or adult is left behind. It is therefore essential to better support countries are struggling to meet the demand for more and better data for the global education goals and targets. This includes increasing funding to line ministries and national statistical offices for the training, resources and support needed to collect and use data for their own education priorities.

3. The Agenda 2030 and SDG4 – vertical and horizontal interconnectedness
As far as can been seen from our region, SDG 4 has the best implementation mechanism through its own Framework and regional/national coordination and support mechanisms. It is nevertheless critical to ensure linking up with the Agenda-wide efforts both at national and regional level, so that education remains central to the Agenda as a whole. In this sense, we need to make sure that MOE focal points actively participate in national SDG work.

Regional plan of activities for 2019

In implementing Dead Sea Commitments for 2019-2020, the Arab Regional Support Group is planning to organize a number of activities this year. An indicative list is as follows:

- Arab Region’s Journey towards 2030 – First Five-Year Report
  ➢ Dates: From March 2019 to March 2020
  ➢ Partners: UNESCO/ABEGS with SDG4 Partners Group
• Regional indicator training workshop
  ➢ Dates: 15-19 April 2019
  ➢ Partners: UNESCO, ABEGS, UIS and UNICEF
  ➢ Venue: Sharm el Shiekh, Egypt

• The role of Arab Universities in achieving SDG4
  ➢ Dates: April, June, July and September 2019
  ➢ Partners: Ministries of Higher Education, Universities, National Commissions for UNESCO

• Regional workshop on developing Alignment Framework
  ➢ Dates: 7-20 June 2019
  ➢ Venue: Beirut, Lebanon
  ➢ Partners: UNESCO (HQ-Africa-Arab inter-regional cooperation)

The major initiative of the year is the one of documenting Arab Region’s journey towards 2030 – First Five-Year Report (2015-2019). This will take stock of progress made at country level. National reports and a regional synthesis will be ready by early 2020.

Resources

• Global web portal on SDG4: https://en.unesco.org/education2030-sdg4
• Arab regional web portal on SDG4: http://education2030-arab-states.org
• Tarbiyah21: http://www.tarbiyah21.org
Stay in touch

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